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CDC at JPHCOPH

December 13, 2013

Dr. Manjunath Shankar and Mr. Gabriel Rainisch from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) had delivered two interesting lectures to the students of Jiann-Ping Hsu College of Public Health, Georgia Southern University, on November 21, 2013.

Titled “Anthrax: Current Status in the US, Bioterrorism Agent and Public Health Response Modeling”, Mr. Rainisch gave a lecture on the background of anthrax as a pathogen, its potential use as a bioterrorism agent and how he and his collaborators created an Excel-based modeling tool to predict the epidemic curve from the first few days of patient data after an intentional aerosolized release of anthrax. Additionally, the tool permits evaluation of post-exposure prophylaxis options and the impact of the event on the healthcare systems.

Following Mr. Rainisch’s lecture, Dr. Manjunath Shankar gave a lecture, titled “Dengue in Puerto Rico: Estimating the degree of under-reporting”. Dr. Shankar introduced to his audience the basics of dengue, before moving to the challenges encountered in dengue surveillance and how he estimated the level of under-reporting in Puerto Rico.

Both speakers also shared with the audience their career paths and their experience working in the CDC.

“I have enjoyed attending the presentations given by public health professionals from the CDC. It has given me a real world perspective of how I can apply my knowledge from my courses to a job in the field,” said Cherell Cottrell-Daniels, 2nd year MPH Epidemiology student.

“Having the CDC speakers come to Jiann-Ping Hsu and discuss their research was an AMAZING experience that I was very fortunate to have witness. I truly enjoyed how both speakers expressed how you can take what you love and form a career out of it. The tips they provided me with as I embark on my exploration into public health, I will cherish and use on my journey towards achieving my dreams,” said Wayne R. Lawrence, one of our 1st year MPH Epidemiology students.

Another 1st year MPH Epidemiology student, Jessica Sexton wrote, “As a first semester student, having the opportunity to hear the perspectives of experienced public health professionals is absolutely invaluable. It was also truly informative to hear their insight on navigating the public health workforce as a new graduate and ways to gain experience.”

Gabriel Rainisch, MPH, works as an epidemiologist in the Health Economics Modeling Unit (HEMU), Division of Preparedness and Emerging Infections, National Center for Emerging and Zoonotic Infections. Manjunath Shankar, MBBS, MHA, PhD, works in the same unit as a health economist. Both were former colleagues of Dr. Isaac Fung, our new assistant professor of epidemiology, who prior to Georgia Southern, worked as a Prevention Effectiveness Fellow in the same unit.

“Gabriel and Manjunath are very good colleagues of mine,” said Dr. Isaac Fung. “They are excellent scientists, passionate public health practitioners and very nice and friendly persons. It was my privilege to have worked with them for two years in the Health Economics Modeling Unit in the CDC.”

Working together with his mentor – distinguished CDC health economist Dr. Martin Meltzer, Dr. Fung had worked with his former HEMU colleagues, like Dr. Shankar and Mr. Rainisch, to develop the modeling capacity within CDC. As a unit, they took part in a number of public health emergency responses, including that of the avian influenza A(H7N9) in 2013. They were awarded the Director’s Recognition Award by the National Center for Emerging and Zoonotic Infectious Diseases for their excellent performance during the H7N9 response, providing “CDC leadership with a comprehensive analysis of H7N9 strategies including: airport screening, school closings, vaccination, anti-viral drugs, respiratory protective devices, and mechanical ventilators”.

Around 35 students and 3 faculty members attended the lectures by Mr. Rainisch and Dr. Shankar. The lectures were part of the EPID 7135 Epidemiology of Infectious Diseases course, taught by Dr. Fung, every Thursday evening in Fall 2013.

“There are many reasons that I am enthusiastic about my public health education at Georgia Southern”, wrote Jessica Sexton, one of our MPH students, “And attending guest lectures is certainly one of them. I look forward to future lectures!”